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(A) System zur Freisetzung und Isolierung von Nukleinsäuren

Ein Verfahren zur Freisetzung und Isolierung von Nukleinsäuren aus biologischen Kompartimenten einer Probe benutzt ein Gerät immer, welches zur Aufnahme eines oder mehrerer Probenbearbeitungsgefäße, zur Thermostatisierung der Probenbearbeitungsgefäße, zum Schütteln der Probenbearbeitungsgefäße und zur magnetischen Abscheidung von Magnetpartikeln geeignet ist. Hierdurch wird die Isolierung von Nukleinsäuren wesentlich vereinfacht.

DE 195 12 368 A1



beispielsweise erhalten werden aus Körperflüssigkeiten, z. B. Blut, Speichel oder Urin.

Unter Freisetzung der Nukleinsäuren wird im Sinne der Erfindung der Austritt der Nukleinsäuren aus den biologischen Kompartimenten verstanden. Dieser Austritt kann auf beliebige Weise geschehen. Bevorzugt findet der Austritt durch Zerstörung der die biologischen Kompartimente gegen die Flüssigkeit abgrenzenden Wand statt. Dies kann beispielsweise erreicht werden durch Behandlung der Kompartimente mit zellwandzerstörenden Mitteln, z. B. Proteinase K.

Unter der Isolierung von Nukleinsäuren wird die Abtrennung der Nukleinsäurne von anderen Bestandteilen der Probe verstanden. Solche anderen Bestandteile sind beispielsweise die Wände der biologischen Kompartimente, deren Abbauprodukte, weitere Inhaltsstoffe der biologischen Kompartimente sowie Inhaltsstoffe der Flüssigkeit, welche die biologischen Kompartimente in der Probe umgibt. Hierzu gehören beispielsweise Proteine, Inhibitoren für Enzyme, insbesondere Nukleinsäure-abbauende Enzyme, wie DNase. In diesem Sinne kann Isolierung auch als eine Art Reinigung der Nukleinsäuren verstanden werden. Diese Isolierung kann sowohl spezifisch als auch unspezifisch im Hinblick auf weitere in der Probe enthaltenen Nukleinsäuren sein.

Unter einem Nachweis von Nukleinsäuren wird erfindungsgemäß ein Verfahren verstanden, bei welchem die Anwesenheit oder Menge von Nukleinsäuren bestimmt wird. Diese Verfahren können sowohl quantitativ als auch qualitativ vorgenommen werden. Für die Durchführung quantitativer Nachweise wird in der Regel ein Vergleichsversuch mit einer Probe durchgeführt, die eine bekannte Menge der nachzuweisenden Nukleinsäuren enthält. Der Nachweis kann sowohl sequenzspezifisch als auch sequenzunspezifisch sein. Um die Nachweise spezifisch zu machen, verwendet man in der Regel sogenannte Sonden, die dadurch gekennzeichnet sind, daß sie eine Nukleobasensequenz aufweisen, die mehr oder weniger charakteristisch für die Nukleinsäuren in der Probe 20 ist. Sofern ein spezifischer Nachweis von Nukleinsäuren gewünscht wird, wird eine Sonde eingesetzt, die eine Basensequenz enthält, welche komplementär zu der Basensequenz der nachzuweisenden Nukleinsäure, nicht jedoch zu anderen Nukleinsäuren in der Probe, ist. Sonden können Moleküle sein, die eine direkt oder indirekt nachweisbare Gruppe enthalten. Direkt nachweisbare Gruppen sind beispielsweise radioaktive (32P) farbige oder fluoreszierende Gruppen oder Metallatome. Indirekt nachweisbare Gruppen sind beispielsweise immunologisch oder enzymatisch wirksame Verbindungen, wie Antikörper, Antigene, Haptene, Enzyme oder enzymatisch aktive Teilenzyme. Diese werden in einer nachfolgenden Reaktion oder Reaktionssequenz detektiert. Besonders bevorzugt sind Haptene, z. B. Digoxygenin oder Biotin. Solche haptenmarkierten Sonden können in einer anschließenden Reaktion mit einem markierten Antikörper gegen das Hapten leicht nachgewiesen wer-

In einem ersten Schritt wird die Probe in einem Probenbearbeitungsgefäß zusammen mit magnetischen Partikeln (Beads), welche die biologischen Kompartimente binden können, unter Schütteln des Probenbearbeitungsgefäßes inkubiert. Unter Magnetpartikeln werden Partikel verstanden, welche durch einen Magneten in eine bestimmte Richtung transportiert werden können. Hierzu gehören beispielsweise ferromagnetische oder superparamagnetische Materialien. Besonders bevorzugt im Sinne der Erfindung sind ferromagnetische Materialien. Partikel sind feste Materialien mit einem geringen Durchmesser. Im Sinne der Erfindung sind besonders Partikel geeignet, die eine durchschnittliche Korngröße von mehr als 2,8 µm, jedoch weniger als 200 µm haben. Besonders bevorzugt weisen sie eine durchschnittliche Korngröße zwischen 10 und 15 µm auf. Bevorzugt ist die Korngrößenverteilung homogen. Diese Partikel sind an ihrer Oberfläche so modifiziert, daß sie die biologischen Kompartimente binden können. Hierfür geeignete Magnetpartikel sind die bekannten und käuflichen Latexmagnetpartikel, an welche z. B. Antikörper gebunden sein können. Zur Bindung der biologischen Kompartimente an die Magnetpartikel werden insbesondere Antikörper verwendet, welche gegen Oberflächenantigene der biologischen Kompartimente gerichtet sind. Derartige Magnetpartikel sind ebenfalls kommerziell erhältlich.

Das Probenbearbeitungsgefäß befindet sich bevorzugt in einer Baueinheit 10 des Systems, die zur festen Aufnahme des Probenbearbeitungsgefäßes geeignet ist. Die Baueinheit kann auch mehrere Gefäße aufnehmen.

Besonders bevorzugt besteht diese Baueinheit in einer Platte, in welcher sich so viele Löcher befinden, wie Gefäße aufgenommen werden sollen. Die Löcher sind in ihrer Geometrie auf die Gefäße aufgepaßt. Die Befestigung der Gefäße in der Baueinheit ist bevorzugt so gestaltet, daß die Gefäße nach Durchführung der Probenbearbeitung auf einfache Weise wieder entnommen werden können. Bevorzugt ist an der Baueinheit ein Schlauch befestigt, der Unterdruck von einer Absaugeeinheit, z. B. einer Vakuumpumpe, bis zu dem Loch in der Baueinheit 10 und somit, bei aufgesetztem Probenbearbeitungsgefäß, bis an dessen Auslaßöffnung leitet. Im Fall des Anlegens eines Unterdrucks wird daher Flüssigkeit bzw. Luft aus dem Probenbearbeitungsgefäß durch den Schlauch zur Pumpe gefördert. Geeignete Ventile sind bevorzugt so gesteuert, daß der Unterdruck nur dann an dem Probenbearbeitungsgefäß anliegt, wenn eine Förderung erfolgen soll.

Die Inkubation der Proben mit den Magnetpartikeln kann auf beliebige Weise gestaltet werden. Erforderlich ist, daß sowohl die Probe als auch die magnetischen Partikel in das Probenbearbeitungsgefäß eingebracht werden. Sowohl die Art der Einbringung als auch deren Reihenfolge ist prinzipiell ohne größere Bedeutung für das erfindungsgemäße Verfahren. Bevorzugt jedoch werden die magnetischen Partikel in Form einer Suspension mit einem bekannten Gehalt magnetischer Partikel in das Probenbearbeitungsgefäß pipettiert. Entweder anschließend oder vorher wird die Probe in das Probenbearbeitungsgefäß einpipettiert.

Die Inkubation wird solange unter geeigneten Bedingungen vorgenommen, bis eine ausreichende Menge an biologischen Kompartimenten an die Magnetpartikel gebunden ist. Es wird sich hierbei im Regelfall um einen Zeitraum zwischen 1 min und 10 min handeln. Das Probenbearbeitungsgefäß ist hierbei bevorzugt auf geeignete Weise, z. B. mittels eines Deckels oder/und eines Ventils verschlossen.

Ein wesentliches Merkmal der Erfindung ist, daß das in dem Probenbearbeitungsgefäß befindliche Gemisch während der Inkubation geschüttelt wird. Es kann sich hierbei um ein Intervallschütteln handeln. Das Schütteln kann jedoch auch während der gesamten Inkubationszeit oder nur Teilen davon durchgeführt werden. Das Schütteln dient dazu, eine ausreichende Mischung der biologischen Kompartimente und der Magnetpartikel in

195 12 368

bewegen. In diesem Fall werden doppelt so viele Magneten wie Gefäße verwendet. Im Beispielsfall ist der Radius der Kreisbahn ca. 8 mm und der weiteste Abstand des Magneten vom Probengefäß ca. 12 mm.

In einer alternativen Anordnung werden für n Gefäße n+1 Magneten verwendet. Hier werden ein und derselbe Magnet zwischen zwei benachbarte Tubes geführt, man spart also n-1 [=2n-(n+1)] Magnete. In der Stellung "ON" übt der Magnet maximale Wirkung auf die Magnetbeads aus. In der Stellung "OFF" ist der Magnet so weit vom Tube entfernt, daß er keine Wirkung auf die Magnetbeads ausübt. Die Fahrzeit (t) zwischen den Endstellungen "ON" bzw. "OFF" beträgt bevorzugt weniger als 1,5 s.

Eine weitere Alternative ist die relativ fixe Positionierung zwischen Magnet und Gefäß, aber die Bewegung

eines abschirmenden µ-Metalls zwischen Magnet und Gefäß.

Der Magnet weist eine Masse bevorzugt zwischen 0,5 und 5 g, besonders bevorzugt zwischen 1 und 4 g auf, im 10 speziellen Fall 2,3 g. Die äußeren Abmessungen betragen 10 mm × 10 mm × 3 mm. Als geeignetes Material für einen Permanentmagneten haben sich seltene Erdmaterialien (z. B. NeFeBr, VACODYM 370 HR) mit einem optimalen BH-Maximum bei kleinsten Abmessungen erwiesen. Insofern ist es vorteilhaft, den Gradienten des Magnetfeldes besonders ausgeprägt zu dimensionieren. Aus diesem Grund soll auch die Positionierung des Magneten möglichst nah bei dem Gefäß erfolgen. Es ist bevorzugt, möglichst Probenbearbeitungsgefäße zu 15 wählen, die eine möglichst geringe Dämpfung des Magnetfeldes bewirken, z. B. aus Polypropylen.

Unter der Gefäßwand des Probenbearbeitungsgefäßes wird zur Abscheidung der Beads in der Regel die Innenwand oder ein Teil davon, welche unter der Flüssigkeitsoberfläche der Probe befindlich ist, verwendet.

Bevorzugt handelt es sich um eine Seitenwand des Gefäßes.

Anschließend wird die die biologischen Kompartimente umgebende Flüssigkeit aus dem Probenbearbeitungs- 20 gefäß entfernt. Dies geschieht unter Bedingungen, bei denen die Magnetpartikel an der Gefäßwand zurückbleiben. Die Art der Entfernung hängt von der Art des Probenbearbeitungsgefäßes ab. Sie kann z. B. abpipettiert werden. In einer bevorzugten Ausführungsform jedoch, bei der das Probenbearbeitungsgefäß eine untere Auslaßöffnung aufweist, wird die Flüssigkeit durch diese einfach abgesaugt. Diese Art der Entfernung hält die mechanische Belastung der Magnetpartikel gering und vermeidet somit die Ablösung der Magnetpartikel von 25 der Gefäßwand.

Ein besonders wichtiger Schritt ist die Resuspension der an der Gefäßwand zurückgehaltenen Magnetpartikel in einer zugegebenen zweiten Flüssigkeit. Hierzu wird der Magnet aus der Nähe des Gefäßes entfernt, so daß die Magnetpartikel nicht mehr durch den Magneten an der Gefäßwand sestgehalten werden. Wie oben beschrieben, ist es auch möglich, das Gefäß aus der Nähe des Magneten zu entfernen. Gemäß der vorliegenden Erfindung hat 30 sich das einfache Entfernen des Magneten als nicht für eine ausreichende Resuspension erwiesen, wenn nicht das Gefäß ergänzend, bevorzugt gleichzeitig geschüttelt wird. Dieses Schütteln wird wiederum durch die Einheit 30 durchgeführt. Sie bewirkt eine gleichmäßige Verteilung der Magnetpartikel in der zweiten Flüssigkeit. Diese zweite Flüssigkeit kann vor Entfernen des Magneten, jedoch auch erst nach Entfernen des Magneten in das Probenbearbeitungsgefäß eingefüllt werden, z. B. durch Einpipettieren.

Das erfindungsgemäße Verfahren kann auch zur weiteren Aufreinigung von biologischen Kompartimenten verwendet werden, Hierzu wird eine Suspension der Magnetpartikel, welche die biologischen Kompartimente gebunden enthalten, in einem Probenbearbeitungsgefäß so in Relation zu einem Magneten positioniert, daß die Magnetpartikel mit den biologischen Kompartimenten an der Gefäßwand festgehalten werden, anschließend die Flüssigkeit, welche die biologischen Kompartimente enthielt, aus dem Gefäß entfernt wird und anschließend die Magnetpartikel in einer zweiten Flüssigkeit, hier einer Waschflüssigkeit, durch Entfernen des Magneten aus der Nähe des Gefäßes, so daß die Magnetpartikel nicht mehr durch den Magneten an der Gefäßwand festgehalten werden, und gleichzeitig Schütteln des Gefäßes resuspendiert. Dieser Waschvorgang kann beliebig wiederholt

werden, bis eine ausreichende Reinheit der biologischen Kompartimente erreicht ist.

-Als weiterer Schritt des erfindungsgemäßen Verfahrens ist anschließend der Aufschluß (Lyse) der biologischen Kompartimente vorgesehen. Verfahren zum Aufschluß biologischer Kompartimente sind dem Fachmann ebenso bekannt, wie die spezifischen Bedingungen für bestimmte Arten von Kompartimenten, z. B. Zellen. Beispielsweise werden für den Aufschluß von Bakterien die biologischen Kompartimente mit einer Mischung von Proteinase K versetzt und für eine bestimmte Zeit inkubiert, die für das Ausbrechen bzw. den teilweisen oder vollständigen Verdau der Zellwände unter Freisetzung der in den biologischen Kompartimenten enthaltenen Nukleinsäuren inkubiert wird. Dabei wird bevorzugt bei Temperaturen über Raumtemperatur, besonders bevorzugt zwischen 70 und 95°C gearbeitet. Die Mischung, welche durch den Aufschluß der Zellen erzeugt wird, wird im folgenden auch als Aufschlußmischung bezeichnet. Die Inkubation wird vorzugsweise über eine Zeit von 5 bis 20, besonders bevorzugt zwischen 10 und 15 Minuten durchgeführt.

Insbesondere, wenn der Aufschluß der Zellen bei Raumtemperatur oder geringfügig erhöhter Temperatur 55 stattgefunden hat, ist es bevorzugt, die Aufschlußmischung anschließend auf höhere Temperaturen zu erhitzen, beispielsweise auf 70°C, oder, bei potentiell infektiösen Proben, auf 95°C. Hierbei kann gewünschtenfalls auch

das Lysereagenz, sollte es bei weiteren Schritten stören, inaktiviert werden.

Heizung bzw. Kühlung der Flüssigkeit in den Probengefäßen wird erfindungsgemäß durch eine Einheit 20 vorgenommen. Diese Einheit, welche aus prinzipiell für Thermostate üblichen Baueinheiten besteht, ist vorzugsweise teilweise in die Einheit 10, in welcher die Probenbearbeitungsgefäße positioniert werden können, integriert. Sie enthält insbesondere einen Block aus Metall, welcher wärmeleitende Eigenschaften hat. Dieser ist auf die äußere Form der Probenbearbeitungsgefäße abgestimmt und wird bevorzugt über ein flüssiges Medium thermostatisiert. Je nach in dem Probenbearbeitungsgefäß durchzuführenden Reaktionsschritt wird die Temperatur dieses Blocks erhöht bzw. erniedrigt. Als flüssiges Medium können bekannte Mittel dienen. Das Medium 65 wird bevorzugt über flexible Schläuche von einer Heizung bzw. Kühlung mittels einer Umwälzpumpe in den Block transportiert. Die Verwendung flexibler Schläuche ermöglicht auch die Befestigung der stationären Komponenten, wie der Heizung, der Kühlung und der Umwälzpumpe auf dem während des erfindungsgemäßen

Ebenfalls bevorzugt sind die Einheiten 40 und 10 relativ zueinander beweglich gelagert. Außerdem bevorzugt weisen die Probenbearbeitungsgefäße (A) eine untere Auslaßöffnung (A11) auf, die mit einer Saugvorrichtung 50 verbunden sind oder verbunden werden können.

In Fig. 1 und 2 ist ein System mit erfindungsgemäßen Einheiten schematisch gezeigt:

Das Modul 10 nimmt ein oder mehrere Probenbearbeitungsgefäße (A) auf und sorgt dafür, daß der Wärmeübergang entsprechend den geforderten Heiz- und Kühlraten optimiert ist. Das Modul sorgt für eine minimale Abweichung der Temperatur von Kavität zu Kavität. Das Modul nimmt das Temperaturmedium (z. B. Wasser) auf und gibt die Wärme bzw. Kälte zielgerichtet in Richtung Probenbearbeitungsgefäß.

Das Modul nimmt die Mechanik 40 zur Bewegung der Magneten auf (Magneten und Drehachsen). Der Motor

kann sich außerhalb des Moduls befinden, z. B. auf dem Rahmen positioniert.

Das Modul verbindet die Probenbearbeitungsgefäße zum gemeinsamen Mischen. Das Modul ist mit der

Mischeinrichtung 30 verbunden.

Das Modul nimmt die Absaugschläuche 51 für die Absaugung der aus den Probengefäßen zu entfernenden Flüssigkeiten (den Waste) auf. Das Modul ist zwischen Probenbearbeitungsgefäß und einem Sockel 13, z. B. aus Polysulfon, abgedichtet, damit beim Absaugen des Waste keine Luft zwischen Probenbearbeitungsgefäß und 15 Inlet 14, Block, z. B. aus Aluminium mit Löchern 12, angesaugt wird.

Das Modul hat eine leicht zu reinigende Obersläche und schützt den Anwender vor Verbrennungen (z. B.

durch einen Kunststoffmantel).

Einheit 20 besteht im wesentlichen aus flüssigen Temperierelementen, einem 3/2-Wege-Ventil, Leitungen 21, Heizung, Kühler und Umwälzpumpe. Das Temperierreservoir außerhalb des Moduls ist um ein Vielfaches 20 größer als das Totvolumen des DNA-Moduls damit beim Umschalten des 3/2-Wege-Ventils die Störgröße minimiert wird. Die Heizung und der Kühler temperieren im Vorlauf und werden bei Bedarf getaktet. Eine Regelung schaltet das Ventil, Heizung und Kühlung, zusammen mit dem geeigneten Volumenstrom der Umwälzpumpe werden die gewünschten Heiz- und Kühlraten erreicht.

Alternativ besteht die Einheit 20 aus trockenen Temperierelementen. Die Heizstäbe zum Heizen und Peltiers 25 zum Kühlen sind direkt in dem DNA-Modul integriert. Vorteil: Kein Liquid-Flow-System in diesem extremen

Temperaturbereich.

Die Einheit 30 mischt und resuspendiert. Ein Schrittmotor mit einem Exzenter und einer Ausgleichsmasse treiben von einem festen Rahmen, das über Schwingungsdämpfer 11 aufgesetzte komplette DNA-Modul in eine kreisförmige exzentrische Bahn fester Amplitude und variabler Frequenz. Die Amplitude ist A ≤ 1,5 mm, die 30 Frequenz 1 ≤ f ≤ 50 Hz Die Misch- bzw. Resuspensionsdauer beträgt je nach physikalischen Eigenschaften des Probenmaterials zwischen 5 < t < 30 s. Durch Austausch des Excenters ist es aber auch in wenigen Minuten möglich die Amplitude manuell zu varüeren.

Die Einheit 40 besteht aus einem Zahnriemen, der auf einer Seite des DNA-Moduls mit jeweils vier Wellen zur Aufnahme von je 4 Magneten und Zahnrad an den Stirnseiten die Drehbewegung des DC-Motors in die 35 Kreisbewegung der Magneten wandelt. Die beiden Endpositionen werden mit jeweils einer Lichtschranke detektiert. Auf der gegenüberliegenden Seite des DNA-Moduls befindet sich genau die gleiche Anordnung, so daß die Magneten jeder Seite sich synchron entgegengesetzt aufeinander zu bewegen. In diesem Fall werden

doppelt so viele Magneten wie Gefäße verwendet.

In einer alternativen Anordnung werden für n Gefäße n+1 Magneten verwendet. Hier werden ein und derselbe Magnet zwischen zwei benachbarte Gefäße geführt, man spart also n-1 [= 2n-(n+1)] Magnete. In der Stellung "ON" übt der Magnet maximale Wirkung auf die Magnetbeads aus. In der Stellung "OFF" ist der Magnet so weit vom Gefäß entfernt, daß er keine Wirkung auf die Magnetbeads ausübt. Die Fahrzeit zwischen den Endstellungen "ON" bzw. "OFF" beträgt t < 1,5 s.

Die Kopplung der Komponenten des Systems ist einerseits funktionell, z. B. durch Integration der Magneten 45 in die Einheit 10, und andererseits zeitlich zu verstehen, z. B. durch Steuerung des Betriebs der Einheiten in für die gewünschte Anwendung geeigneter Abfolge; dies kann beispielsweise geschehen durch ein Computerpro-

gramm oder durch Initiation der einzelnen Teilschritte durch den Anwender.

In Fig. 3 ist ein erfindungsgemäßes Verfahren zur Isolierung von Nukleinsäuren gezeigt. Auf diese Figur wird bei der im folgenden Beispiel beschriebenen Schilderung eines Verfahrens Bezug genommen. Das Probengefäß befindet sich in einer Aufnahme in Einheit 10, wobei bevorzugt am Probengefäß ein Steg A20 vorgesehen ist, der der Innenform der Aufnahme angepaßt ist (z. B. konische Außenform). Die im Längsschnitt gezeigten Gefäße können auf einfache Weise spritzgußtechnisch aus Polypropylen hergestellt werden.

Ein Hauptvorteil der Erfindung ist, daß das System in weitem Umfang auf die Verwendung unterschiedlicher Größen von Magnetpartikeln adaptiert werden kann. Es ist relativ flexibel und in unterschiedlichsten Verfahren 55

einsetzbar.

Durch das folgende Beispiel wird der Gegenstand der Erfindung näher erläutert.

Beispiel 1

Bei dem erfindungsgemäßen Verfahren handelt es sich um ein Verfahren, dessen Grundzüge dem Fachmann aus der Nukleinsäurediagnostik bekannt sind. Soweit experimentelle Details im folgenden nicht ausgeführt sind, wird vollinhaltlich auf Molecular Cloning, Herausgeber J. Sambrook et al., CSH 1989 Bezug genommen.

In einer besonderen Ausführungsform des erfindungsgemäßen Verfahrens für die Aufarbeitung nukleinsäurehaltiger Probenlösungen, werden folgende Arbeitsschritte durchgeführt (siehe Fig. 3). In einem ersten Schritt (1) wird eine zellhaltige Probenflüssigkeit in einem Probegefäß A mit einem Material inkubiert, an welches die Zellen gebunden werden, aus denen Nukleinsäuren gewonnen werden sollen. Hierzu kann dieses Material entweder spezifische Bindeeigenschaften für die Oberfläche der Zellen aufweisen, z. B. durch Immobilisierung

195 12 368 DE

vollständig verläuft, sollte die Innenkontur des Elutionsgefäßes möglichst dicht an die Außenkontur des Form-

körpers angepaßt sein.

In einem folgenden Schritt wird der Deckel B von der Kombination aus Formkörper C und Elutionsgefäß D entfernt (X). Er wird benutzt, um einen Stempel E aufzunehmen (XI) und in den Hohlraum des Formkörpers C einzuführen (XII). Dieser Deckel greift von innen in den Stempel E. Der Stempel wird so kräftig gegen den Filter C11 gepreßt, daß Flüssigkeit aus dem Filter durch eine in der Andruckssläche befindliche Öffnung in einen Innenraum des Stempels eindringt. Dieser Vorgang ist besonders effektiv, wenn die Andrucksfläche in ihrer äußeren Kontur zumindest in dem Bereich, in dem die Auspressung stattfinden soll, an die innere Kontur des Formkörpers Cangepaßt ist. Der Stempel E kann bevorzugt in dieser Lage, z. B. durch Einrasten, fixiert werden. Da die so gebildete Vorrichtung durch den Deckel relativ gut verschlossen ist, kann die nukleinsäurehaltige 10 Lösung in der Vorrichtung aufbewahrt werden.

Zur Entnahme einer gewünschten Menge an Nukleinsäurelösung kann der Deckel entfernt (XIII) und über eine Öffnung des Innenraums des Stempels die gewünschte Menge entnommen, z. B. in einem Pipettiervorgang

(XIV). Anschließend kann der Deckel wieder aufgesetzt werden.

Im folgenden wird das zu dem geschilderten Verfahren passende Ablaufschema angegeben.

		(
Gerät	Anwender	20
automatisch (programmgesteuert)	mamuell	
- temperieren	- pipettieren	
- absangen	- Tubes, Glasvlieseinsatz, Back-Up	25
- separieren (magn. Festphase)	Gefäß auf Gerät plazieren	
- mischen/resuspendieren		30

15

40

45

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60

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Manuelle Arbeitsschritte sind fettgedruckt dargestellt. Nicht-manuelle Arbeitsschritte oder Teilabläufe werden durch Betätigen beispielsweise einer Taste aufgerufen.

Im folgenden werden das Probengefäß A als Tube, Elutionsgefäß D als Back-Up-Gefäß, Formkörper C als 35 Glasvlieseinsatz und Stempel E als Auspreßstempel bezeichnet.

9

DE 195 12 368 A1

Schritt#	Aktion	Zeit (s)	
20.1	3. Waschschritt (optional)		
	pipettieren - Waschlösung 500-1.000 µl (nieder-		ľ
······································	molares Salz) in Tubes #1-16		-
20.2	resuspendieren; Frequenz = 30 Hz (parallel)	5 s	1
20.3	Magnet AKTIV (parallel)	5 s	_]
20.4	absaugen - Waste (sequentiell 5 s)	80 s	1
20.5	Magnet INAKTIV (parallel)	5 s	-
21	pipettieren - Lyse-Mix, Reagenz 1+2 (400 µl)		1
	Guanidinium Hydrochlorid oder Guanidinium	ľ	
	Rhodanid und Proteinase K (25 µl) in Tubes #1 - 16		
22	Deckel - Tubes verschließen (16 Stück)		
23	resuspendieren; Frequenz = 30 Hz (parallel)	5 s	1
24	Inkubation: 9 = 70 °C	600 s	
	[Optional: Inkubation: 9 = 95 °C bei pot. infekt. Proben]	900 s	
25	Inkubation: 9 = RT	300s	1
26	Deckel - Tubes öffnen (16 Stück)		
27	pipettieren - Ethanol (Isopropanol) 200 μl in Tubes # 1 - 16		
28	Deckel - Tubes verschließen (16 Stück)		}
29	Mischen; Frequenz = 30 Hz (parallel)	30 s	
30	Deckel - Tubes δffnen (16 Stück)		
31	Glasviies-Einsatz in Tube # 1 einsetzen in Tubes # 1 - 16		
32	absaugen - Waste (sequentiell 5 s)	80 s	

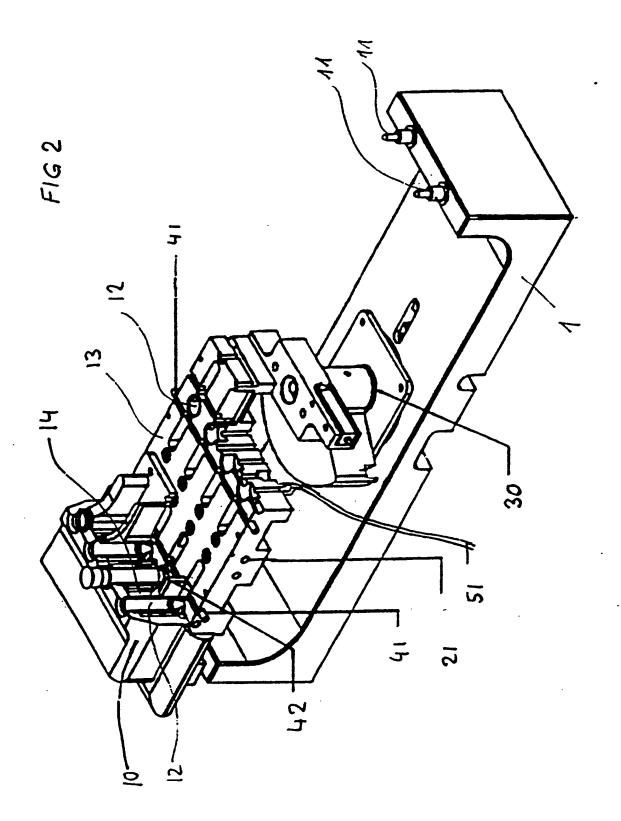
DE 195 12 368 A1

E Stempel	
10 Andrucksfläche 11 Außenkontur 12 Innenraum 13 Öffnungen in der Andrucksfläche 14 Entnahmeöffnung 15 Dichtung	5
16 Einrastring 17 Aussparung	10
Gerät	
1 Rahmen	
10 Einheit zur Aufnahme von Probengefäßen	15
11 Schwingungsdampf 12 Loch zur Aufnahme von A	
13. Sockel	
14 Inlet zum Heizen und Kühlen von A	20
20 Einheit zur Thermostatisierung von Probengefäßen 21 Kühl-/Heizmittel-Leitung	
20 Einheit zum Schütteln von Probengefäßen/Excentermotor	
40 Einheit zum Breiten Abscheidung von Magnetpartikeln 41 Achsen zum Drehen der Magnetsegmente	
42 Magnetsegmente	25
50 Vakuumpumpe	
51 (Unterdruck-)Schlauch	
Patentansprüche	30
1. Verfahren zur Freisetzung und Isolierung oder zur Freisetzung und Nachweis von Nukleinsäuren aus biologischen Kompartimenten einer Probe, enthaltend die Schritte: — Inkubation der Probe in einem Probenbearbeitungsgefäß zusammen mit Magnetpartikel, welche die	
 Inkubation der Probe in einem Probeinbear beitungsgetab ein einem Probeinbear beitungsgefäßes, biologischen Kompartimente binden können, unter Schütteln des Probenbearbeitungsgefäßes, Positionierung eines Magneten in der Nähe des Gefäßes, so daß die Magnetpartikel an der Gefäßwand festgehalten werden, 	
 Entfernen der resultierenden Flüssigkeit aus dem Gerab Resuspension der Magnetpartikel in einer zweiten Flüssigkeit durch a) Entfernen des Magneten aus der Nähe des Gefäßes, so daß die Magnetpartikel nicht mehr durch den Magneten an der Gefäßwand festgehalten werden und gleichzeitig b) Schütteln des Gefäßes. 	40
 Aufschluß der unter Herstellung einer Aufschlußmischung, Erwärmung der Aufschlußmischung, 	
 Abkühlung der Mischung unter Bedingungen, die die isonerung oder Trybridischung der 20 besterenden oder nachzuweisenden Nukleinsäure ermöglichen. Verfahren gemäß Anspruch 1, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß während der genannten Schritte die Nuklein- 	
säuren nicht aus dem Gefäß entfernt werden. 3. Verfahren gemäß Anspruch 1, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß die genannten Schritte in einem einzigen	
Reaktionsblock stattfinden. 4. Verfahren gemäß Anspruch 1, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß die magnetischen Partikel eine Größe von	
mehr als 2,8 µm haben. 5. System zur Freisetzung und Isolierung von Nukleinsäuren aus einer Suspension von biologischen Kom-	•
partimenten mit Magnetpartikeln enthaltend die Komponenten — eine Einheit (10) zur Aufnahme eines oder mehrerer Probenbearbeitungsgefäße (A), — eine Einheit (20) zur Thermostatisierung der Probenbearbeitungsgefäße (A) und darin enthaltener	
Flüssigkeiten, — eine Einheit (30) zum Schütteln der Probenbearbeitungsgefäße (A), — eine Einheit (40) zur magnetischen Abscheidung der Magnetpartikel an eine Wand jedes Probenbe	-
arbeitungsgefäßes (A), in aufeinander abgestimmter Kopplung.	60
6 System gemäß Anspruch 5, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß es zusätzlich Einheit (50) zur Enderhang von	1
Flüssigkeit aus dem Probenbearbeitungsgefab (A) enthalt. 7. System gemäß Anspruch 5 oder 6, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß die Einheiten (40) und (10) relativ	٧
8. System gemäß Anspruch 5, dadurch gekennzeichnet, das die Probeinden bertuitgsgetabe (v.) eine die Auslaßöffnung (A11) aufweisen, die mit einer Saugvorrichtung (70) verbunden ist oder verbunden werde	
kann. 9. System gemäß Anspruch 5, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß es eine Vielzahl von Probenbearbeitungsgefä	ı -

- Leerseite -

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54 System for the release and isolation of nucleic acids

57 A method for the release and isolation of nucleic acids from biological compartments of a sample always employs a device that is suited for accepting one or more sample processing containers, thermostatically controlling and shaking the sample processing containers and magnetically separating magnetic particles. This substantially simplifies the isolation of nucleic acids.

Description

The subject matter of the invention consists of a system for releasing and isolating nucleic acids and a method for using this system.

Detection methods that are based on the determination of nucleic acids in a sample have been contemplated with increasing interest in recent times. This interest lies, to name one example, in the achievable high specificity of the test. Nucleic acid detection in this context is fundamentally superior to antigen detections. However, while antigens are often already relatively accessible in a sample, nucleic acids, particularly the detection of organisms, generally require a few steps to be made accessible. Moreover, nucleic acids are present as a rule in very small concentrations. Purification methods, which to this point in time have been expensive, are known in the art with the isolation of nucleic acids from samples containing cells.

The sample enrichment and sample preparation systems for nucleic acids currently offered on the market do not permit any targeted enrichment of cells using magnetic particles. The sensitivity in these methods is often insufficiently high. The currently obtainable automatic sample preparation systems require organic solvents (phenol/alcohol and/or chloroform/alcohol mixtures to obtain nucleic acids.

The currently used methods implementing an immobilization of nucleic acids employ essentially two principles to isolate nucleic acids. In a first possibility, liquid samples containing nucleic acids are suctioned through a solid-phase matrix, the nucleic acids being held in the solid-phase matrix. This assumes a prior lysis step that was executed in a divided container. Next, the nucleic acids are dissolved by suctioning them through an elution liquid from the solid-phase matrix. The elution solution is suctioned off in a container for further processing. However, what stood out is that the equipment currently used is insufficient with regard to the purity required to carry out a later amplification reaction, e.g. PCR.

In a second principle, the nucleic acids are precipitated and separated using a centrifuge. However, in this method a socalled batch operation is indispensable. In a method of this type, a solution, containing cells for example, is laced in a first reaction container with lysis agents. Next, the reaction mixture is re-pipetted from the container into a centrifuge test tube. This test tube has an insert on which the released nucleic acids can be absorbed, while the remaining liquid can flow during the centrifuging into the lower area of the test tube. To wash the absorbed nucleic acids, the insert is treated one or more times with a washing liquid. To do this, the insert must be transferred into another centrifuge test tube so that no residues of the sample liquid end up back in the insert. In the last step, the insert is introduced into another new container. The nucleic acids would be converted into a solution that can be processed further by centrifuging an elution solution by inserting it into

an additional container. However, this method is encumbered by a high contamination risk and, on the other hand, a multiplicity of changes of the reaction tank are required.

The object of the present invention was to produce a system in which the disadvantages of the prior art are completely or at least partially eliminated. In particular, nucleic acids can be absorbed and desorbed at a solid-phase matrix without a centrifuge being required for these steps.

A key element of the invention is the use of simple modules typically occurring in analysis systems for operating the system.

The subject matter of the invention is a method for the release and isolation or detection of nucleic acids from biological compartments of a sample, including the steps:

- Incubation of the sample in a sample processing container together with magnetic particles, which can bond the biological compartments, while shaking the sample processing container.
- Positioning of a magnet in the vicinity of the sample processing container, so that the magnetic particles are held against the container wall,
- -Removal of the resulting liquid from the sample processing container,
- -Resuspension of the magnetic particles in a second fluid by,
 - a) Removal of the magnets from the vicinity of the sample processing container so that the magnetic particles are no longer held against the wall and simultaneous
- b) Shaking of the sample processing container,- Decomposition of the biological compartments under heating,
- Cooling of the decomposition mixture under conditions that enable an immobilization or hybridization of the nucleic acids to be isolated or detected.

Also a part of the subject matter of the invention is a system for release and isolation of nucleic acids from a suspension of biological compartments with magnetic particles.

Nucleic acids in the sense of the present invention are nucleic acids that are present in biological compartments. In particular cells of a viral or bacterial origin are understood as falling under biological compartments. In an especially preferred case, the cells are present in an essentially isolated condition. In principle, multi-cell compartments can be processed according to the convention. These compartments with their nucleic acids are present in a sample at the beginning of the method according to the invention. Preferably, this sample is a suspension of the biological compartments in a liquid. Such samples can be obtained, for example, from body fluids, e.g. blood, saliva or urine.

The exit of nucleic acids from the biological compartments is to be understood as falling under the concept according to the invention of the release of nucleic acids. This exit can occur in a variety of optional ways. Preferably, the exit occurs by disintegration of the wall partitioning the biological compartments from the fluid. This can be achieved, for example by treating the compartments with agents that destroy cell walls, e.g. proteinase K.

The separation of the nucleic acids from other constituents of the sample is to be understood as falling under the concept of the isolation of nucleic acids. Such other constituents are, for example, the walls of the biological compartments, their decomposition products, additional substances contained in the biological compartments and substances contained in the liquid that surrounds the biological compartments in the sample. Among these are, for example, proteins and inhibitors for enzymes, in particular nucleic-acid-decomposing enzymes such as Dnase. In this sense, isolation can also be understood as a type of purification of the nucleic acids. This isolation can be either specific or unspecific with regard to other nucleic acids contained in the sample.

A method in which the presence or quantity of nucleic acids is determined is to be understood as falling under the concept according to the invention of a detection of nucleic acids. These methods can be quantitative as well as qualitative in nature. For the execution of quantitative detection, a comparative test is conducted with a sample that contains a known quantity of the nucleic acids to be detected. The detection can be either specific or unspecific with regard to sequence. In order to make the detection specific, one normally uses so-called probes that are characterized in that they have a nucleo-base sequence that is more or less characteristic for the nucleic acids in the probe. If a specific detection of nucleic acids is desired, a probe is inserted that contains a base sequence that is complementary to the base sequence of the nucleic acid to be detected, but not to other nucleic acids in the sample. Probes can be molecules that contain a directly or indirectly detectable group. Directly detectable groups are, for example, radioactive (32P) color or fluorescent groups or metal atoms. Indirectly detectable groups are, for example, immunologically or enzymatically active compounds such as antibodies, antigens, haptenes, enzymes or enzymatically active partial enzymes. These are detected in a subsequent reaction or reaction sequence. Especially preferred are haptenes, e.g. digoxygenin or biotin. Such haptene-marked probes can easily be tested against the haptene in a subsequent reaction with a marked antibody.

In a first step, the sample is incubated in a sample processing container together with magnetic particles (Beads), which can bond the biological compartments, while the sample processing container is shaken. Particles that can be transported by a magnet in a certain direction are to be understood as falling under the term magnetic particles. Included in this are,

for example, ferro-magnetic or superparamagnetic materials. Especially preferred in the sense of the invention are ferromagnetic materials. Particles are solid materials with a small diameter. In the sense of the invention, particles that have an average grain size of more than 2.8 μm , but less then 200 μm are especially suitable. Especially preferably, they have an average grain size of between 10 and 15 μm . The grain size distribution is preferably homogenous. These particles are modified on their surface so that the biological compartments can bond. Magnetic particles suitable for this are the known and commercially available latex magnetic particles, to which antibodies, for example, can be bonded. Antibodies that in particular are aligned against surface antigens are used to bond the biological compartments to the magnetic particles. Magnetic particles of this type are also commercially obtainable.

The sample processing container is preferably located in a modular unit 10 of the system that is suited for the fixed acceptance thereof. The modular unit can also accept several containers. Especially preferably, this modular unit consists of a plate in which there are as many holes as there are containers to be accepted. The holes have a geometry adapted to the containers. The attachment of the containers in the modular unit is preferably to be configured so that the containers can easily be removed after the sample processing has been performed. Preferably, attached to the modular unit is a tube that routes negative pressure from a suction unit, for example a vacuum pump, up to the hole in the modular 10 and thus, with the sample processing container mounted, up to the discharge opening of the container. In the case of applying a negative pressure, liquid or air is therefore transported out of the sample processing container through the hose to the pump. Suitable valves are preferably regulated so that the negative pressure is then applied to the sample processing container only if a conveyance is to occur.

The incubation of the samples having the magnetic particles can be configured in a variety of optional ways. What is required is that both the sample and the magnetic particles be fed into the sample processing container. Both the type of feeding and the sequence thereof are in principle without great significance for the process according to the invention. However, the magnetic particles in the form of a suspension having a known content of magnetic particles are preferably pipetted into the sample processing container. The sample is pipetted into the sample processing container either beforehand or afterwards.

The incubation is performed under appropriate conditions long enough for a sufficient quantity of biological compartments to be bonded to the magnetic particles. This is normally a time period of between 1 and 10 minutes. The sample processing container is preferably sealed off in the process by appropriate means, e.g. by a cover and/or a valve.

An important feature of the invention is that the mixture found in the sample processing container is shaken during the

incubation. This can take place at intermittent intervals. However, the shaking can also be performed during the entire incubation time, or only parts thereof. The shaking is employed to achieve a sufficient mixing of the biological compartments and the magnetic particles in liquid, especially the suspension or resuspension of the beads and the acceleration of the diffusion. In this way, the incubation time required for bonding the biological compartments to the magnetic particles is reduced.

The shaking is achieved by movement of the sample processing container, preferably in a horizontal direction. Especially preferably, a unit 10, which contains receptacles (holes) with one or more sample containers, is moved so that all sample containers located therein are shaken together. In the sense of the invention, the use of a unit 30 that does not manually perform the movement of the sample processing containers (A) is preferred. This unit can in principle be any mechanical apparatus that is suitable for mixing liquids in a container. A preferred example of such a unit is described below.

A stepping motor having an eccentric and a counterweight drives the complete DNA module (unit 10), which is mounted with vibration dampers on a fixed frame 1, into a circular eccentric track of fixed amplitude and variable frequency. The preferred amplitude is A ≤ 1.5 mm, the preferred frequency is $1 \leq f \leq 50$ Hz. The mixing or resuspension duration, depending on the physical characteristics of the sample material, is between 5 and 30 seconds. However, by replacing the eccentric, it is possible to manually vary the amplitude even in a few minutes.

The combination of the system according to the invention with a pipetting apparatus is, as such, not obvious, since the provision of a defined positioning of the sample container before and after the pipetting is required for this. The shaking of the containers otherwise leads to the containers being located in another position after each shaking cycle. If the displacement of the transport track of the containers would result in the pipetting apparatus pipetting the liquid to be pipetted beside a container instead of into it, an orderly execution of an automatic process would be practically impossible. Therefore, it is ensured that the container after shaking is located in a defined, so-called home position in which a pipetting or other processes could occur.

The use of a stepping motor is advantageous compared to the use of a DC motor for the defined home position and to the use with the fully automatic pipetting complex. The home position is detected using a light barrier.

With respect to the structural design, there are also the following non-invasive alternative possibilities, which, however, are more complex and expensive in construction (1. and 2.) or take a longer time in the mixing steps (3.):

1. A combination of one, two, or three linear drives within the plane or within space (X-, Y-, Z-axis) for the generation of Lissajous figures, for example.

- 2. Tumbling, shaking or knocking of the DNA module.
- 3. Magnetic stirrer

The sample processing container (A) can in principle have any desired form. Such sample processing containers can be, for example, the recess of a micro-titer plate, e.g. in the 96 well format. However, this is preferably a hollow cylindrical container that has a top intake opening and especially preferably has a bottom discharge opening. A sample processing container of this type can be used for the reduced-contamination processing of nucleic acid samples. These containers preferably consist of

plastic, e.g., polypropylene.

After the incubation and bonding of the compartments to the magnetic particles, the biological compartments are removed from the liquid surrounding them. To do this, it has proven useful to collect the magnetic particles having the biological compartments bonded to them by positioning a magnet in the vicinity of the sample processing container. In this way the magnetic particles along with the biological compartments are preferably held against the container wall. Especially preferably, in the sense of the invention, a unit (40) having one or more permanent magnets or electromagnets is moved close to the sample processing container for the positioning of the magnets. The resulting distance of magnets from the sample processing container depends strongly on the size of the magnetic field that can be attained using the magnets and the size and magnetizability of the magnetic particles. In addition, the type of processing steps following later (e.g. mechanical loading of the magnets) has an effect on strength of the magnetic field to be used. If this is a permanent magnet, it is brought from a position that is insufficient for the separation of the magnetic particles during the incubation step to a position in the vicinity of the container so that the magnetic particles are held against the container wall. In the case of using an electromagnet, it is switched on and left in the switched-on state until a processing of the biological compartments that are held fast against the wall is completed.

The case wherein the container is brought near the magnet is also to be understood as falling under the concept of positioning a magnet near the container. Ultimately, this involves only the movement of the magnets in relation to the container.

The unit (40) preferably has a magnet that can be moved toward the sample processing container on a predetermined track, e.g., over rails or, preferably, by the movement of magnets on a circular track, e.g. about an axis positioned to the side of the sample container. Included here also is a motor that can execute the movement of the magnet both toward and away from the sample processing container. Preferably, the unit (40) has a toothed belt, which on one side of the DNA module uses four shafts for the acceptance of 4 magnets and on the end face has a toothed wheel to convert the rotary motion of the DC motor into the circular movement of the magnets. The two end positions are each

detected using a light barrier. On the opposite side of the DNA module, there is exactly the same arrangement so that the magnets of each side move synchronously toward each other. In this case, twice as many magnets as containers are used. In the exemplary case, the radius of the circular track is about 8mm and the largest distance of the magnets from the sample container is about 12 mm.

In an alternative arrangement, n+1 magnets are used for n containers. In this case, one and the same magnet is guided between two adjacent tubes; thus n-1[=2n-(n+1)] magnets are spared. In the "ON" position, the magnet uses exerts maximum effect on the magnetic beads. In the "OFF" position, the magnet is so far from the tube that is exerts no effect on the magnetic beads. The drive time (t) between the end-positions "ON" or "OFF" preferably amounts to less than 1.5 seconds.

Another alternative is the relative fixed positioning between magnet and container, but with the movement of a covering $\mu\text{-metal}$ between magnet and container.

The magnet preferably has a mass between 0.5 and 5 g, especially preferably between 1 and 4 g, in the special case 2.3 g. The outer dimensions are 10 mm x 10 mm x 3 mm. Rare earth materials (e.g. NeFeBr, VACODYM 370 HR) with an optimal BH maximum at the smallest dimensions have proven themselves as a suitable material for a permanent magnet. In this respect, it is beneficial to size the magnetic field especially distinctively. For this reason also the positioning of the magnets should occur as close as possible to the container. It is preferred, if possible, to select sample processing containers that attenuate the magnetic field as little as possible, e.g. those made of polypropylene.

The inner wall, or a part thereof, which is located under the liquid surface of the sample, is generally used under the container wall of the sample processing container to cover the beads. Preferably, this is a side wall of the container.

Next, the liquid surrounding the biological compartments is removed from the sample processing container. This occurs under conditions at which the magnetic particles stay back on the container wall. The type of removal depends on the sample processing container. It can, for example, be pipetted off. However, in a preferred embodiment in which the sample processing container has a bottom discharge opening, the liquid is simply suctioned off through it. This type of removal keeps the mechanical stress of the magnetic particles low and thus prevents the detachment of the magnetic particles from the container wall.

An especially important step is the resuspension of the magnetic particles held back on the container wall in an added second liquid. To do this the magnet is removed from the vicinity of the container so that the magnetic particles are no longer held firm against the container wall by the magnet. As described above, it is also possible to remove the container from the vicinity of the magnet. According to the present invention, the simple removal of the magnet did not prove to be sufficient for

an adequate resuspension if the container is not also shaken, preferably at the same time. This shaking is in turn performed by unit 30. It produces an even distribution of the magnetic particles in the second liquid. However, before removing the magnet, this second liquid can only be inserted, e.g. by pipetting it in, after the magnet in the sample processing container has been removed.

The method according to the invention can also be used for additional purification of biological compartments. To accomplish this, a suspension of the magnetic particles, which contains the bonded biological compartments, is positioned in a sample processing container in relation to a magnet so that the magnetic particles are held against the container wall along with the biological compartments. Next, the liquid that contained the biological compartments is removed from the container and then the magnetic particles are resuspended in a second liquid, here a washing medium, by removing the magnet from the vicinity of the container so that the magnetic particles are no longer held to the container wall by the magnet and by simultaneously shaking the container. This washing process can be repeated if desired, until a sufficient purity of the biological compartments is achieved.

The decomposition (lysis) of the biological compartments is next provided as an additional step of the process according to the invention. Methods for decomposing biological compartments are familiar to one skilled in the art, as are the specific conditions for certain types of compartments, e.g. cells. For example, the biological compartments for the decomposition of bacteria are laced with a mixture of proteinase K and incubated for a certain amount of time, which is incubated for the breakup or the partial or full digestion of the cell walls while releasing the nucleic acids contained in the biological compartments. It is preferable in this context to work at temperatures above room temperature, especially preferably between 70 and 95 °C. The mixture, which is produced by the decomposition of the cells is hereinafter referred to as the decomposition mixture. The incubation is preferably performed over a time period of 5 to 20 minutes, especially preferably between 10 and 15 minutes.

In particular, if the decomposition of the cells has occurred at room temperature or at a slightly higher temperature, it is preferable to then heat the decomposition mixture to a higher temperature, for example to 70 °C, or, in the case of potentially infectious samples, to 95 °C. This can, if desired, deactivate even the lysis reagent, should it interfere in further steps.

According to the present invention, heating or cooling of the liquid in the sample containers is performed by a unit 20. This unit, which principally consists of components that are typical for thermostats, is preferably partially integrated into unit 20 in which the sample processing containers can be positioned. It contains in particular a block made of metal that

has heat conductive properties. It is matched to the exterior shape of the sample processing containers and is preferably thermostatically controlled by a liquid medium. Depending on the reaction step to be performed in the sample processing container, the temperature of this block is increased or decreased. Known substances can be used for the liquid medium. The medium is preferably transported into the block through flexible hoses from a heating or cooling unit via a recirculating pump. The use of flexible hoses also enables attachment of the stationary components, such as the heater, the cooling unit and the recirculating pump, to the frame of the device, which is not moved with unit 10 during the process according to the invention. This is made possible in particular by virtue of the deflections being only relatively small during the shaking motions.

Next, the decomposition mixture is cooled down and specifically under conditions that depend on the purpose of the process according to the invention. If an isolation of nucleic acids is to occur on a solid phase, conditions are set up in which the nucleic acids can bond to this solid phase. A suitable method for bonding nucleic acids is the incubation of the released nucleic acids using glass surfaces in the presence of chaotropic salts. A method of this is described, for example, in European Patent A-0 389 063. According to this patent, the nucleic acids are bonded to the glass surface in an unspecified manner, while other components of the biological compartment and the decomposition reagents are either not bonded to the glass surface or are bonded only to an insignificant degree. Preferably, the liquid containing the remaining components is then removed, e.g., suctioned off, from the sample processing container, while the glass surface along with the nucleic acids bonded to it can remain in the sample processing container. In a preferred embodiment, a solid phase in the form of a glass-fiber veil is introduced into the sample processing container and incubated along with the mixture. As a result, the nucleic acids on the glass fiber are immobilized and in a simple way can be removed from the sample processing container along with the glass-fiber veil.

For the case in which the nucleic acids are to detected after their release, they are hybridized using a probe. This probe, as described above is a molecule that has a base sequence complementing the nucleic acid to be detected or a portion thereof. In a preferred case, this is an oligonucleotide that is marked with a detectable group. The cooling of the reaction mixture therefore takes place under conditions in which a hybridization of the nucleic acid to be detected occurs using the nucleic acid probe. These temperatures are known to anyone skilled in the art. In another embodiment, a hybridization between the nucleic acid to be detected and a solid-phase-bonded nucleic-acid probe is used as a method for detecting nucleic acids. According to this method, the probe can be used on any solid phase, just so long as it can only be separated from the remaining reaction mixture, e.g., micro-titer plate cavities or

the inner wall of the sample processing container. Methods for immobilizing nucleic acid probes, in particular the so-called catcher probes, are known to anyone skilled in the art, for example from European Patent A-0 523 557.

Generally, a separation of the nucleic acids to be isolated or detected from the surrounding liquid, which in some cases still contains residue of the decomposition mixture and possibly residue of the reagents used to bond the nucleic acids to a solid phase will follow the cooldown of the mixture. To do this, depending on the type of solid phase used, one can filter or remove the solid phase from the sample processing container or pipette the liquid off from the sample processing container.

The bonded nucleic acids are then available either for neutralization of their bonding to the solid phase or for their direct detection in standard methods known to anyone skilled in the art for detecting nucleic acid sequences or a marking.

The method according to the invention therefore uses a combination of processing steps that employ a unit 10 for accepting one or more sample processing containers, a unit 20 for thermostatic control of the sample processing containers and liquids contained therein, a unit 30 for shaking the sample processing containers and a unit 40 for magnetic separation of the magnetic particles at a wall of each sample processing container. Surprisingly, these processing steps and units can be executed in a single reaction block. "Reaction block" in this context is to be understood as an arrangement that partially or completely contains the units 10, 20, 30 and 40 in a manner wherein the components are harmonized in relation to each other. In a manner according to the invention, it is possible to have a process run in a simple manner in a single device wherein previously a number of manual working steps were assumed. In particular, it was shown that the reaction blocks according to the invention are especially effective. Methods for the release and isolation of nucleic acids can be executed with them faster than before. Moreover, it is possible during the steps mentioned not to remove the nucleic acids from the container. With regard to the expenditure of time and the prevention of contamination, this illustrates a considerable step forward compared to the prior art. Typically in the past, cooling of suspensions was performed by manual removal of a sample processing container from the device and immersion of the container in a cooling bath. A process of this type has proven to be insufficiently suited for routine diagnostics in the future.

A system for releasing and isolating nucleic acids from a suspension of biological compartments is therefore also part of the subject matter of the invention. It contains the following components:

⁻ a unit 10 for accepting one or more sample processing containers (A),

⁻ a unit 20 for the thermostatic control of the sample processing containers (A) and the liquids contained therein,

- a unit 30 for the shaking of the sample processing containers (A) and
- a unit 40 for the magnetic detachment of the magnetic particles on the wall of each sample processing container (A),

all of the above being coupled together in a coordinated manner.

Unit 10 preferably has the possibility of accepting several sample processing containers. Especially preferably, there is the possibility of accepting micro-titer plates in the 96-well format. Preferably, this system also contains a unit 50 for the removal of fluid from the sample processing container (A). Units 40 and 10 are also preferably arranged so as to be movable in relation to each other. In addition, the sample processing containers (A) preferably have bottom discharge openings (A11) that are connected to a suction device 50 or can be connected to it.

A system with units according to the invention is schematically shown in Figures 1 and 2:

Module 10 accepts one or more sample processing containers (A) and ensures that the heat transfer is optimized in accordance with the required heating and cooling rates. The module ensures a minimal deviation of the temperature from cavity to cavity. The module receives the temperature medium (e.g. water) and gives off heat or cold targeted in the direction of the sample processing container.

The module accepts mechanical unit 40 for the movement of the magnets (magnets and rotational axes). The can be located outside of the module, e.g., positioned on the frame.

The module joins the sample processing containers together for common mixing. The module is connected to mixing apparatus 30.

The module accepts the suction hose 51 for suctioning off the liquid (the waste) to be removed from the sample containers. The module is sealed between the sample processing container and a base 13, made for example of polysulphone, so that no air is sucked between sample processing container and inlet block 14, made of aluminum for example, having holes 12 while suctioning off the waste.

The module has a surface that is easy to clean and protects the user from being burned (e.g. by employing a plastic cover).

Unit 20 essentially consists of liquid temperature regulation elements, a 3/2-way valve, lines 21, heater, cooler and recirculating pump. The temperature control reservoir outside of the module is larger than the total volume of the DNA module by factor at which the disturbance variable is minimized when the 3/2-way valve is switched on an off. The heater and cooler control the first runnings and if needed can operate on a timed cycle. A controller switches the valve, heater and cooler and together with the appropriate volume flow of the recirculating pump achieve the desired heating and cooling rates.

Alternatively, unit 20 can consist of dry temperature

regulation elements. The heating elements for heating and the Peltier elements for cooling are integrated directly into the DNA module. Advantage: No liquid-flow system in this extreme temperature range.

Unit 30 mixes and resuspends. A stepping motor having an eccentric and a counterweight, all positioned on a solid frame, drive the complete DNA module, which is set on vibration dampers 11, into a circular eccentric track of fixed amplitude and variable frequency. The amplitude is A ≤ 1.5 mm, and the frequency is $1 \leq f \leq 50$ Hz. The mixing or resuspension time is with the range 5 < t < 30 seconds. However, by replacing the eccentric, it is also possible to manually vary the amplitude in a few minutes.

Unit 40 consists of a toothed belt, which on one side of the DNA module uses four shafts for the acceptance of 4 magnets and a toothed wheel on the end face to convert the rotary motion of the DC motor into the circular movement of the magnets. The two end limit positions are detected using light barrier at each end. Located on the opposite side of the DNA module is precisely the same arrangement so that the magnets of each side move synchronously in opposing directions toward each other. In this case, twice as many magnets as containers are used.

In an alternative arrangement, n+1 magnets are used for n containers. In this case, one and the same magnet is guided between two adjacent containers, and thus n-1 = 2n-(n+1) magnets are spared. In the "ON" position, the magnet exerts maximum effect on the magnetic beads. In the "OFF" position, the magnet is far enough removed from the container that it exerts no effect on the magnetic beads. The driving time between the "ON" and "OFF" end positions is t < 1.5 seconds.

The coupling of the components of the system is to be understood on one hand as functional, e.g. by integration of the magnets in the unit 10, and on the other hand as time-related, e.g. by regulation of the operation of the units in a sequence appropriate for the desired use; this can be accomplished, for example, using a computer program or by the user initiating the individual steps.

A method for the isolation of nucleic acids according to the invention is shown in Figure 3. Reference is made to this figure for the delineation of a method described in the following example. The sample container is located in a receptacle in unit 10, a web preferably being provided on the sample container that is adapted to the interior shape of the receptacle (e.g. conical exterior shape). The containers shown in longitudinal crosssection can be produced out of polypropylene in a simple manner using injection molding technology.

A principal advantage of the invention is that the system in an extended scope can be adapted to the use of various sizes of magnetic particles. It can be employed relatively flexibly and in widely varying methods.

The subject matter of the invention is explained in greater detail using the following example.

Example 1

The method according to the invention is a method whose basic features are known to anyone skilled in the art from the field of nucleic acid diagnostics. To the extent that experimental details are not described in detail below, the complete content thereof can be obtained from Molecular Cloning, publisher J. Sambrook et al, SCH 1989.

In a special embodiment of the method according to the invention, the following operational steps are carried out for the processing of sample solutions containing nucleic acids (see Figure 3). In a first step (I), a sample liquid containing cells is incubated in a sample container A along with a material to which the cells are bonded, from which nucleic acids are to be obtained. For this purpose, this material can have either specific bonding properties for the surface of the cells, e.g. by immobilization of antibodies against surface antigens or an absorber material (A 16, not shown here). However, a material with filter characteristics (A 15, not shown) can also be provided whereby the cells are held back if the liquid passes through the material, e.g. is removed from the sample container. Conditions for the immobilization of cells on surfaces are known to anyone skilled in the art, e.g. from Methods in Enzymology Vol. 171, "Biomembranes/Part R Transport Theory: Cell and Model Membranes", Edited by Sidney Fleischer, Becca Fleisher, Department of Molecular Biology, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, pp. 44 and following or 581 and following.

During the incubation, the sample container is preferably sealed by a cover B to ensure active or passive contamination

protection.

In an additional step, the liquid is removed from the sample container, while cells, whose nucleic acids are to be isolated, remain bonded to the material in the sample container. Since the material for bonding cells involves particular materials, a holding back can be accomplished by the material being magnetic (manufacturer: Dynal, Oslo, Norway) and the magnet being brought from outside up to the sample container. The liquid can be suctioned through the outlet opening All while applying a light vacuum. A valve, which opens by application of negative pressure, is provided for this purpose on the discharge opening.

For more extensive removal of any interfering sample components from the cells, one or more washing steps are provided. To do this the sample container is filled with a washing liquid in which any impurities are dissolved, but which does not significantly affect the bonding of the cells to the surface of the cell-bonding material. Washing solutions of this type are known to anyone skilled in the art, e.g. from the cell separation protocols or from corresponding purity protocols for nucleic acids. They are determined essentially according to the type of bonding of the cells to the material.

After a last washing solution, when used, has been suctioned out of the sample container, the cleaned, enriched cells are

brought into contact with a lysis liquid suited for the release of nucleic acids from the cells. The reagents of this lysis solution are to a large extent determined according to the type of immobilized cells (Rolfs et al.: PCR, Clinical Diagnostics and Research, Springer Verlag, 1992, p 84 and following). If the cells are bacteria, the lysis solution preferably contains proteinase K for the decomposition of the cell wall. If desired, the lysis is supported by heating or cooling as well as mixing of the reaction mixture by shaking the sample container. At the end of this decomposition, the nucleic acids to be isolated are present in a free state in the solution.

Even during the lysis, the reaction container is preferably sealed by a cover in order to avoid contamination from the surrounding environment. After the end of the lysis, the cover is removed, preferably using an appropriate mechanical device. Then, a shaped body C, the outer contour C12 of which is matched to inner contour A17 of the sample container, is introduced into the sample container, which contains a mixture of decomposition products of the cells as well as the nucleic acids. This shaped body is hollow and in the direction toward the sample container and the related mixture is enclosed by a filter C11 (porous matrix). The introduction of the shaped body C is preferably accomplished using a component B11 of cover B, which also contains a component B10 that is suited for sealing the sample container. In this case, the shaped body is engaged with the cover (II) and at the same time is introduced into the sample container along with the closure of the sample container. During this process, the reaction mixture will also penetrate through filter C11 into hollow space C14 of shaped body (IV). By provision of the filter, on the one hand large particles can be blocked at the entrance into the hollow space and on the other hand a bonding of the nucleic acids to the filter is achieved, due to the nucleic acid bonding properties, even during the passage of the reaction mixture through the hollow space. In this case, a filter material containing glass fibers is selected.

In a next step, the remaining lysis reaction mixture is removed from the device formed by A and C by suctioning it through discharge opening All into the sample container. This also removes the solution that has intruded into hollow body C14 of the shaped body so that the filter, to the greatest extent possible, contains no more liquid. Then, the previously used cover B is removed, shaped body C remaining (snapped on) for the time being in the sample container (V).

Simultaneously or subsequently, an elution container D is prepared for acceptance of shaped body C (either within the system according to the invention or outside). Any cover located on this container is removed (VI). Preferably, before transferring shaped body C into elution container D, an elution solution is placed in the elution container, e.g. pipetted in. The composition of the elution solution is determined according to the type of bonding of the nucleic acids to the material in filter C. It contains reagents, under the effect of which the

immobilized nucleic acids are eluted, i.e. released, from the material. Cover B originally enclosing the elution container is snapped onto sample container A along with shaped body C (VII).

To remove shaped body C from sample container A, shaped body C is removed along with cover B (VIII). The combination of cover and shaped body is then introduced into the elution tank (IX). Preferably, shaped body C contains means (C13, not shown) for affixing the shaped body in elution container D to ensure that the shaped body can be removed from container D only by destroying the shaped body C or container D or by using a force that is greater then the force that is required to loosen cover B from shaped body C. A removal of the shaped body from the elution container is not intended.

During the penetration of shaped body C into the elution container, the elution solution placed in the container penetrates into filter C11 and it loosens the immobilized nucleic acids from the solid matrix. Depending on the quantity of the elution solution placed in the container, either the filter is saturated only with the elution solution or the elution solution along with the released nucleic acids penetrate into the hollow body C14. In order for the elution of the nucleic acids to proceed to completion, the inner contour of the elution container should be adapted to seal tightly to the outer contour of the shaped body.

In a next step, cover B is removed from the combination of shaped body C and elution container D (X). It is used to accept a plunger E (XI) and to introduce it into the hollow space of the shaped body C (XII). This cover grips from within in plunger E. The plunger is pressed so firmly against filter C11 that liquid from the filter penetrates through an opening located in the pressing surface into an interior space of the plunger. This process is especially effective if the pressing surface in its outer contour, at least in the area in which the pressing is to take place, is adapted to the inner contour of the shaped body C. The plunger E can preferably be fixed in this position, e.g. by latching it in place. Since the device formed in this way is sealed relatively well by the cover, the solution containing nucleic acid can be stored in the device.

To remove a desired quantity of nucleic acid solution, the cover can be removed (XIII) and the desired quantity can be drawn out through an opening of the inner space of the plunger, e.g. in a pipetting process (XIV). Then, the cover can be reapplied.

The flow chart matched to the protected method is specified below.

Device User

automatic (program-controlled) manual

- controlling of temperature pipetting
- suctioning off tubes, glass-fiber veil, placing backup container on the device
- separation (magnetic solid phase)
- mixing/resuspending

Manual operating steps are printed in boldface. Non-manual operating steps or partial sequences are retrieved, for example, by pressing a button.

Hereinafter, sample container A is designated as a tube, elution container D as a backup container, shaped body C as a glass-fiber veil and plunger E as a press-out plunger.

Step #	Action	Time (s)
1	Place tube * 1 - 16 on reaction module	(2)
2	Pipetting - receptor (50-100 μ l) and SA beads (50-100 μ l) in tubes # 1-16	
3	Pipetting - sample (1000 μ l) in tubes # 1 - 16	
4	Cover - close tubes (16 pieces)	
5	Mixing; frequency = 30 Hz (parallel)	30 s
6	Incubation; $9 = 4$ °C, after incubation $9 = RT$ (parallel) $300 - 1,200 \text{ s}$	
6*	Mix during incubation if necessary	
7	Magnet ACTIVE (parallel)	5 s
8	Suction off waste (5-s sequences)	80 s
9	Magnet INACTIVE (parallel)	5 s
10	Cover - open tube (16 pieces)	
11	1^{st} washing step pipetting - wash solution 500 - 1000 $\mu 1$ (low mola salt) in tubes # 1 - 16	r
12	Resuspending; frequency = 30 Hz (parallel)	5 s

13	Magnet ACTIVE (parallel)	5 s
14	Suctioning off - waste (5-s sequences)	80 s
15	Magnet INACTIVE (parallel)	5 s
16	2^{nd} washing step pipetting - wash solution 500 - 1000 $\mu 1$ (low mola salt) in tubes # 1 - 16	r
17	Resuspending; frequency = 30 Hz (parallel)	5 s
18	Magnet ACTIVE (parallel)	5 s
19	Suctioning off - waste (5-s sequences)	80 s
20	Magnet INACTIVE (parallel)	5 s
20.1	3 rd washing step (optional) pipetting - wash solution 500 - 1000 µl (low mola salt)—in tubes # 1 - 16	r
20.2	Resuspending; frequency = 30 Hz (parallel)	5 ຮ
20.3	Magnet ACTIVE (parallel)	5 s
20.4	Suctioning off - waste (5-s sequences)	80 s
20.5	Magnet INACTIVE (parallel)	5 s
21	Pipetting - lysis mix, reagent 1+2 (400 μ l) Guanidinium hydrochloride or guanidinium thiocynate and proteinase K (25 μ l) in tubes # 1 - 16	
22	Cover - close tubes (16 pieces)	
23 .	Resuspend; frequency = 30 Hz (parallel)	5 s
24	<pre>Incubation: 9 = 70 °C [Optional: Incubation: 9 = 95 °C for potentially infected samples]</pre>	600 s 900 s
25	Incubation: 9 = RT	300 s
26	Cover - open tubes (16 pieces)	
27	Pipetting - ethanol (isopropanol) 200 μ l in tubes # 1 - 16	•
28	Cover - close tubes (16 pieces)	

29	Mixing; frequency = 30 Hz (parallel)	30 s
30	Cover - open tubes (16 pieces)	
31	Install glass-fiber veil in tubes # 1 - 16	
32	Suctioning off - waste (5-s sequences)	80 s
33	Pipetting - wash solution 500 μl (chaotropic salt/ethanol) In tubes # 1 - 16	
34	Suctioning off - waste (5-s sequences)	80 s
35	Pipetting - wash solution 500 $\mu \hat{1}$ (chaotropic salt/ethanol) In tubes # 1 - 16	
36	Suctioning off - waste (5-s sequences)	80 s
37	Set backup container on module (# 1-16)	
38	Pipetting - elution volumes into backup container 200 l) In tubes # 1 - 16	(100-
39	Transfer glass-fiber veil from tub # 1 into backup container (# 1 - 16)	
40	Press-out plunger (# 1 - 16) into backup containe elution	r -
41	Close backup container (16 covers)	
42	Take tube # 1 - 16 from the RM - waste	

If desired, the suction hoses and the recesses are rinsed and thereby cleaned using a cleaning liquid (before or after executing the method and in the absence of sample containers.

Reference number list

- Sample container Α
- Intake opening 10
- Discharge opening 11
- 17
- Interior shape Exterior shape 19
- Circulating web 20
- Element for affixing additional functional elements 22

- B Cover
- 10 Component for sealing sample container A
- 11 Component for gripping shaped body C
- C Shaped body
- 11 Porous matrix
- 12 Outer contour
- 13 Means for affixing the shaped body in the elution container
- 14 Hollow body
- 15 Means for attaching a cover
- 16 Inner contour
- 17 Means for affixing a plunger
- 18 Circulating web, detachable
- 19 Rim
- D Elution container
- 12 Latching notch
- E Plunger
- 10 Pressing surface
- 11 Outer contour
- 12 Inner space
- 13 Openings in the pressing surface
- 14 Discharge opening.
- 15 Seal
- 16 Latch ring
- 17 Recess

Device

- 1 Frame
- 10 Unit for the acceptance of sample containers
- 11 Vibration damper
- 12 Hole for the acceptance of A

and a second of the second of

- 13 Base
- 14 Inlet for heating and cooling of A
- 20 Unit for thermostatic control of sample containers
- 21 Cooling/heating line
- 30 Unit for shaking sample containers/eccentric motor
- 40 Unit for magnetic separation of magnetic particles
- 41 Axes for the rotation of the magnet segments
- 42 Magnet segments
- 50 Vacuum pump
- 51 (Negative pressure) hose

Patent Claims

- 1. A method for the release and isolation or the release and detection of nucleic acids from biological compartments of a sample, including the steps:
 - Incubation of the sample in a sample processing container together with magnetic particles that can bond the biological compartments under shaking of the sample processing container,
 - Positioning of a magnet in the vicinity of the container so that the magnetic particles are held against the container wall,
 - -Removal of the resulting liquid from the container
 - Resuspension of the magnetic particles in a second liquid by
 - a) Removal of the magnet from the vicinity of the container so that the magnetic particles are no longer held against the container wall and simultaneous b) Shaking of the container,
 - Decomposition under production of a decomposition mixture
 - Heating of the decomposition mixture
 - Cooling of the mixture under circumstances that enable the isolation or hybridization of the nucleic acids to be isolated or detected.
- 2. The method as recited in Claim 1, characterized in that during the cited steps, the nucleic acids are not removed from the container.
- 3. The method as recited in Claim 1, characterized in that the cited steps are carried out within a single reaction block.
- 4. The method as recited in Claim 1, characterized in that the magnetic particles have a size greater than 2.8 μm .
- 5. A system for the release and isolation of nucleic acids from a suspension of biological compartments having magnetic particles, said system including the following components:
 - a unit (10) for the acceptance of one or more sample processing containers (A),
 - a unit (20) for the thermostatic control of the sample processing containers (A) and the liquids contained therein, a unit (30) for the shaking of the sample processing
 - containers (A),
 - a unit (40) for the magnetic separation of the magnetic particles on the wall of each sample processing container (A),
 - coupled to each other in a harmonized manner.
- 6. The system as recited in Claim 5, characterized in that it contains an additional unit (50) for the removal of liquid from the sample processing container (A).
- 7. The system as recited in Claim 5 or 6, characterized in that the units (40) and (10) are situated so as to be movable in relation to each other.
- 8. The system as recited in Claim 5, characterized in that the sample processing containers (A) have a lower discharge opening

- (A11) that is connected to, or can be connected to, a suction apparatus (70).
- 9. The system as recited in Claim 5, characterized in that it contains a multiplicity of sample processing containers (A).
- 3 pages of drawings attached

Leerseite = blank page

WASTE Behälter = waste container
Unterdruckvorrat = negative pressure reservoir
VAKUUMPUMPE = vacuum pump
Magnetmechanik für Beadseparation = magnet mechanism for bead
separation
DNA MODUL = DNA module
Excenterantrieb für die Mischfunktion = eccentric drive for
mixing operation
UMWALZPUMPE = recirculating pump
2-WEGE-VENTIL = 2-way valve
HEIZUNG = heater
KÜHLER = cooler